

# MELLOW: Federal investigation stretches across nearly two years

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spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Pennsylvania, said the office would have no comment on whether Mr. Mellow is about to be charged.

Meanwhile, U.S. Attorney Peter J. Smith announced Wednesday that he and representatives from the FBI and the Internal Revenue Services will be conducting a news briefing at 4 p.m. today regarding "a recent development related to the ongoing public corruption investigations."

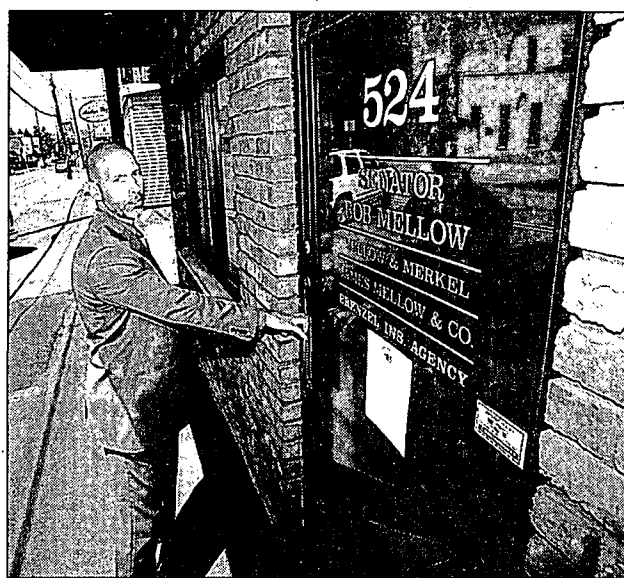
Efforts to reach Mr. Smith were unsuccessful.

## Two-year investigation

The filing of the criminal information would culminate a federal investigation that has stretched over about two years.

The investigation has cast a dark shadow over the career of one of the region's and state's most powerful and once most-popular politicians, the man most responsible for Scranton having a medical school.

In June 2010, FBI and IRS agents raided Mr. Mellow's Archbald home and Senate office in Blakely and the Lake Spangenberg home of his



TIMES-TRIBUNE FILE

**FBI Agent Kevin Wevodau enters Sen. Robert J. Mellow's office at 524 S. Main St., Blakely, in June 2010 as agents with a search warrant investigated the senator's office and Archbald home.**

business associate and former Senate aide, Gabriel J. Giordano, without disclosing the reasons for the raids.

Two months later, Mr. Cognetti, Mr. Mellow's attorney, asked Senior U.S. District Judge A. Richard Caputo to unseal documents connected to search warrants used to raid the home and Senate office.

The judge refused, and Mr. Cognetti appealed the decision, but the 3rd U.S. Circuit

Court of Appeals sided with Judge Caputo and kept the documents out of the public eye.

In its ruling, the appeals court said Mr. Mellow was "being investigated for federal-program theft, extortion, fraud and money laundering."

Though the exact nature of those charges was not publicly known, newspaper investigations uncovered several possible avenues for fed-

eral agents to explore.

## 'Cash' concerns

In 2009, The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Times-Tribune reported that Mr. Mellow's Blakely Senate office on Main Street in Peckville was rented from a company owned by the senator. State taxpayers paid more than \$210,000 in rent over a seven-year period. Mr. Mellow's campaign committee also rented space in the building and paid \$47,000 in rent over seven years, The Times-Tribune found.

Later in 2009, a Times-Tribune investigation found Mr. Mellow's campaign committee, Friends of Bob Mellow, made payments written to "cash" 533 times over an almost nine-year period totaling \$188,464.89 without revealing who received the payments. State law requires identification.

The newspaper later confirmed that over a three-year period from 2006 to 2009, based on documents supplied by the committee, Mr. Mellow received 74 checks made out to cash totaling \$38,134.73.

The appeals court's order hints that the investigation of Mr. Mellow went deeper.

Amid the fight to unseal the search warrant docu-

ments, Mr. Cognetti acknowledged the search warrant had something to do with "political campaign work."

Several former employees of Mr. Mellow's Senate office and a political consultant to his campaign have testified before the grand jury.

Mr. Mellow has mostly refused to discuss the federal investigation, but said at one point he "never once did anything knowingly that was inappropriate."

A spokeswoman for the senator at the time of the raid said that he was "confident he's done nothing wrong."

Nonetheless, Mr. Mellow has prepared for the day he might be charged. His campaign committee last year spent more than \$738,000 on lawyers, including a \$700,000 "legal retainer" paid to Mr. Cognetti, according to the committee's 2011 campaign finance report.

The report does not say specifically what the lawyers were paid for, but the payments were made at a time the federal investigation of Mr. Mellow was intensifying.

## Skilled politician

A diehard Democrat, Mr. Mellow was the senator for the 22nd Senatorial District

from 1970 to 2010, rose to become Democratic Senate leader and twice served as Senate president when Democrats had control of the chamber. He was renowned for his ability to bring state money to projects at local universities and the Commonwealth Medical College, which was endowed by a \$35 million state grant he obtained.

Mr. Mellow, who has two daughters, announced his resignation Feb. 9, 2010, outlining his successes in government but saying he wanted to concentrate on his family.

"The long hours in Harrisburg over the years have cost me precious time with my daughters and now my grandchildren. My choice to put them first is the right thing to do and, as jarring as this decision has been to make, I am confident that now is the right time to do it," he said in a statement then. "My daughters and grandchildren mean the world to me, and in this next chapter of my life, I need to devote more of my time and energy to them."

Four months later, the FBI and IRS raided his home and office.

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# BRIDGE: State could get \$3.3B

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for bridges operated by municipalities and counties that are not part of the National Highway System, he said.

With hundreds of structurally deficient or functionally obsolete off-system bridges throughout the state, the amendment would help counties shoulder the brunt of bridge upkeep by establishing a dedicated revenue stream.

"Far too many bridges in Pennsylvania and across the country are structurally defi-

cient," Mr. Casey said in a press release. "My amendment will improve safety and keep our communities connected, which creates and sustains economic growth."

Mr. Jannetta said local municipalities would work with the state Department of Transportation to determine which bridges would be maintained with the funding.

Although specific bridges haven't been named, PennDOT spokesman James May said funding to do maintenance was key to the continued safety of bridges.

"It's very important for us to have the resources necessary to maintain the bridges in the area," Mr. May said. "What is important is that we do preventative maintenance to save the taxpayers money in the long run."

The act itself would channel almost \$3.3 billion to Pennsylvania for various transportation needs throughout the next two years, according to a press release. The House of Representatives still has to vote on the bill.

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# HOME: Victim fund set up at local bank

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her family has received donated clothes, their real problem is finding an affordable dwelling.

"I know everything's gone, but I don't know what to do next. I don't know where to go. I just feel like I'm going to have a nervous breakdown," Mrs. Flatt said. "We need a roof over our head. That's our basic need."

The Red Cross shelters families in three-day increments, and if housing is not found within that time, another three days may be provided, said William Hontz, emergency services coordinator of the county chapter.

It also works with other social-service agencies and local hotels to try to extend stays, he said.

"Both families are actively looking for places to live. We're going to do what we can on our end," Mr. Hontz said.

Neighbors and friends also are pitching in to help the victims. Neighborhood group West Scranton Cares has opened an account at Fidelity Bank to raise funds for the victims, said organizer Gary Wassel.

Donations may be made payable to "West Scranton Sweetland Street Fire Victims' Fund" at Fidelity Bank on

South Main Avenue.

Meanwhile, Mr. Conforti questioned the Fire Department's response time of five minutes.

"Other than the heartache of knowing the house burned and shouldn't have, the frustration is almost unbearable," Mr. Conforti said. "The more we walk through the house and see the fire, smoke and water damage, it could turn into a bigger loss than we ever anticipated."

Debate has continued over the department's manpower shortage and brownout closures of some of the city's remaining firehouses.

Firefighters have said they lacked adequate manpower at the scene Monday, but the city administration disagrees.

While the first engine company was on scene in five minutes, according to the Fire Department, Mr. Conforti believes it took them at least 15 minutes to arrive.

By that time, the fire raged and jumped to his home, causing severe damage to a wall and attic, he said.

However, Fire Chief Tom Davis said the initial response time was five minutes, as per communication center dispatching.

"To the people involved in a fire, it seems that it's forever," Mr. Davis said. "Everything is done on the clock. It's all validated."

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# YANKS: O'Brien already spoke to Mandalay

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Mr. O'Brien's comments Wednesday came a week after county officials were stunned by the announcement the SWB Yankees-managed ball club would be nicknamed the Empire State Yankees while it plays the 2012 season on the road during the planned \$40 million reconstruction of PNC Field.

Neither the county nor its stadium authority, which owns the franchise, was consulted in advance about the change—a slight that Mr. O'Brien said only heightened public mistrust over Mandalay's motives.

Mr. O'Brien, who said he has already communicated his position to SWB Yankees, said Mandalay must add professional baseball management officials with proven records of "getting the job done at the minor league baseball level" to its local management team.

The New York Yankees need to assist Mandalay in identifying those individuals, he said.

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**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

**Announces Administrative Record Available for Public Review**

**DIMOCK RESIDENTIAL GROUNDWATER SITE**  
Dimock, Susquehanna County, PA

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is required to provide notice to the public of the documents in an Administrative Record used to support decisions within 60 days from an action being taken under our Superfund removal authority. This public notice announces the availability of the Administrative Record file for the response actions as detailed in the January 19, 2012 Action Memorandum for the *Dimock Residential Groundwater Site*.

The 30-day public comment period on the Administrative Record opens **March 16, 2012 and ends April 14, 2012.** Please send comments to U.S. EPA Region 3, 1650 Arch St. (Mailcode 3HS52), Philadelphia, PA. 19103. Attention: Trish Taylor, Community Involvement Coordinator; or email comments to: [r3\\_arweb\\_comments@epa.gov](mailto:r3_arweb_comments@epa.gov)

The Administrative Record is available for public review at:  
**Susquehanna County Library, Montrose Branch**  
18 Monument Street, Montrose, PA 18801. Phone: (570) 278-1881  
and  
**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 3 Office**  
1650 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103  
Please call for an appointment during business hours  
(8:00 AM – 4 PM)  
Paul Van Reed at (215) 814-3157

Information is also available on-line at:  
[www.epa.gov/arweb](http://www.epa.gov/arweb) and  
[www.epaossc.org/dimock\\_residential\\_groundwater](http://www.epaossc.org/dimock_residential_groundwater)

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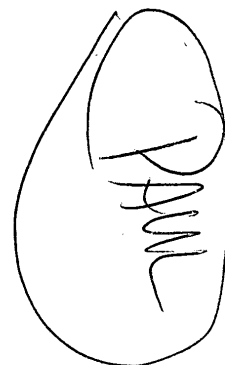
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